2. The Red Cow: The Qur'an and the Midrash

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Abstract

The Qurʾanic narrative of the red cow appears to combine elements from Numbers 19 and Deuteronomy 21. However, it also included elements from rabbinic commentary, such as the debate on the age of the cow and the importance of having a homogenous colour, in which the rabbis disqualified the cow if there were even as much as two hairs that are of a different colour. Also, the Qurʾan states that the Israelites called this precept "ḥaqq," which parallels the rabbinic tradition stating that this is a "ḥoq." While no one understands its paradoxical rationale, where impurity is used to purify and everyone involved in the ritual becomes impure with the same elements that eventually purify, it is a "ḥoq," because they are to obey it due to its divine edict, as it is also echoed in Midrash Tanḥuma and Bamidbar Rabbah.

Although the Qurʾan shows full awareness of the Jewish tradition, there is one major difference in that the Qurʾan puts the narrative in the context of resurrection or bringing life out of the dead, while in Jewish tradition it is a purification ritual. Yet, the paradox is similar, in which the red cow's ritual brings purity from impurity is understood from Bamidbar Rabbah just like Abraham (pure) coming out from

[1] This chapter is an edited version primarily based on Galadari, Abdulla (2021) *Metaphors of Death and Resurrection in the Qur'an: An Intertextual Approach with Biblical and Rabbinic Literature*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 127–146.

Terah (impure), Hezekiah (pure) from Ahaz (impure), Israel (pure) from the nations of the world (impure), and the world to come (pure) from this world (impure).

After the cow's narrative, the Qurʾan speaks of the event in Meribah, similar to Numbers 20. The Qurʾan explains that the Israelites' hearts were like stone or harder, which holds similarity to how Bamidbar Rabbah explains as one of the meanings of "mōrîm" as disobediently stubborn. As such, the Qurʾan appears to be aware of the rabbinic tradition pertaining to the red cow and directly engaging with it.

While the context of the Qurʾan appears to be on resurrection instead of purification, it is argued that the Qurʾan understands resurrection in the cow narrative as purification from "ṭumʾah" or death. Yet, this death does not necessarily have to be even physical death. It holds its similarity with Adam's sin, who lost his opportunity to immortality, and became spiritually dead. Similarly, as the Talmud states that the Israelites became immortal for accepting the Torah, but lost this immortality due to the sin of the golden calf. As such, perhaps the Qurʾan understands this as spiritual death, with which the red cow is undoing the sin of the golden calf that caused such spiritual death, as later Jewish midrashim also emphasize.

INTRODUCTION

The Qurʾan is not short of allusions to the *midrash*, which is acknowledged in Western scholarship ever since Abraham Geiger (d. 1874) wrote *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*.[2] The *Qiblah* passages in the Qurʾan (Qurʾan 2:149–150), for example, make arguments to a Jewish community by utilizing *midrashic* and *haggadic* traditions to emphasize the supremacy of the *Shemaʿ*.[3] The Qurʾan also uses language and terms in those passages that would resonate to their biblical and *haggadic* use when formulating its arguments.[4] Another example is Qurʾan 5:32, which states that God has written to them (referring to the Jews) that whoever destroys a soul is as if they destroyed the whole world and

[2] Geiger, Abraham (1833) *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Bonn: F. Baaden.
[3] Galadari, Abdulla (2013) "The *Qibla*: An Allusion to the *Shemaʿ*," *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 9(1): 165–193.
[4] Ibid.

whoever saves a soul is as if they saved the whole world. The Qurʾan makes such a statement after narrating the story of Cain and Abel. The Mishnah makes a very similar statement also after narrating the story of Cain and Abel.[5] The interesting issue is that Qurʾan 5:32 makes it clear that this tradition is not even attributed to the rabbis, but that God is the one who enacted such a precept to the Jews. As such, the Qurʾan elevates the authority of the Jewish oral tradition, at least in this specific example.

Many recent scholars, such as Gordon Newby,[6] Reuven Firestone,[7] Michael Pregill,[8] Holger Zellentin,[9] Haggai Mazuz,[10] and Michael Graves[11] discuss how the Qurʾan and later Muslim literature are aware of rabbinic traditions. This chapter investigates the Qurʾan's relationship with the Midrash pertaining to the red cow

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[5] m. *Sanhedrin* 4:5

[6] Newby, Gordon D. (1988) *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

[7] Firestone, Reuven (2008) *An Introduction to Islam for Jews*, Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society.

[8] Pregill, Michael E. (2007) "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass*, 1(6): 643–659; Pregill, Michael E. (2008) "Isra'iliyyat, Myth and Pseudepigrapha: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 34: 215–284.

[9] Zellentin, Holger M. (2016) "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*: Religious Leaders in the Qurʾān in Dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic Literature," in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, 262–293, Abingdon: Routledge.

[10] Mazuz, Haggai (2012) "Menstruation and Differentiation: How Muslims Differentiated Themselves from Jews regarding the Laws of Menstruation," *Der Islam*, 87: 204–223; Mazuz, Haggai (2013) "Menstruation Influence on Islamic Folklore: The Case of Menstruation," *Studia Islamica*, 108: 189–201; Mazuz, Haggai (2014) *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*, Leiden: Brill; Mazuz, Haggai (2016) "Possible Midrashic Sources in Muqātil b. Sulaymān's *Tafsīr*," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 61(2): 497–505; Mazuz, Haggai (2016) "The Midrashic Sources of Saʿīd b. Ḥasan," *Revue des études juives*, 175(1–2): 67–81; Mazuz, Haggai (2017) "Ibn Ḥazm and Midrash," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 62(1): 137–152.

[11] Graves, Michael W. (2015) "The Upraised Mountain and Israel's Election in the Qurʾan and Talmud," *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 11(2): 141–177.

ritual. Ali Aghaei has studied this issue on how Muslim exegetes used Jewish sources in the *midrash* and *haggadah* to interpret the red cow passages in the Qurʾan.[12] In this chapter, the Qurʾan's awareness of certain Jewish traditions and sources is studied, instead of only looking at later Muslim exegetes in their attempt to fill the gap. Most importantly, since the Qurʾan appears to be aware of many details pertaining to the red cow ritual from the biblical and rabbinic traditions, the context still appears to be distinct, where the biblical and rabbinic traditions contextualize the ritual as a purification from the dead, the Qurʾan contextualizes it to bringing life back to the dead. The study in this chapter also recognizes the possibility that some late Jewish *midrash*, typically dated post-Qurʾanic might have, at least existed in some oral form during the time of the Qurʾan. This might allow us to re-examine the dating of these *midrash* and their various editing layers by looking at the possible reception of these traditions within the Qurʾan.

The biblical account of the ritual of the red cow is a paradox par excellence.[13] Its absurdity has perplexed Jewish communities throughout history. The ritual is for purification, where those defiled by a dead corpse would be purified. However, the priests and everyone who perform the ritual, themselves being pure, become defiled in the process. The same water that defiled the pure is also used to purify the defiled. While the defilement occurs on account of a corpse, another corpse (the sacrificed red cow) reinstates purity. Therefore, if the Qurʾan suggests that the Israelites asked Moses if he is mocking them, could they truly be blamed? Qurʾan 2:67 states, "And when Moses said to his people, 'God commands you to slaughter a cow (*baqarah*),' they said, 'Do you take us in mockery?' He said, 'I seek refuge in God from being among the ignorant.'"

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[12] Aghaei, Ali (2017) "The Morphology of the Narrative Exegesis of the Qur'an: The Case of the Cow of the Banū Isrāʾīl (Q2:67–74)," in *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations*, eds. Daniel J. Crowther, Shirin Shafaie, Ida Glaser, and Shabbir Akhtar, 167-194, Abingdon: Routledge.

[13] Baumgarten, Albert I. (1993) "The Paradox of the Red Heifer," *Vetus Testamentum*, 43(4): 442–451.

Accordingly, this chapter looks closely into how the Qurʾan understands this ritual paradox, especially in the context of resurrection, in which the Qurʾan apparently situates this ritual. The Qurʾan frequently uses antithesis as a rhetorical style, including something and its opposite arising from one another. For example, God brings out the dead from the living and the living from the dead (e.g., Qurʾan 6:95, 10:31, 30:19). Other examples include bringing the night from the day and the day from the night (e.g., Qurʾan 22:61, 31:29, 35:13, 57:6) and God is described in the same verse as severe in punishment, but yet the most merciful (e.g., Qurʾan 5:98). In Arabic rhetoric, this is known as *muqābalah* or *ṭibāq* (antithesis). It appears that much of the logic and reasoning used by Jewish communities has been highly influenced by Greek philosophy, especially in Hellenistic Judaism,[14] after which much rabbinic literature was styled. The same may be said from the flourishing field of Qurʾanic rhetorical studies. [15] Classical Muslims also used Greek philosophy in their theological discourses.[16] Of course, that does not mean that Jewish philosophy is Greek, but that the Hellenistic influence has played a role in reshaping Jewish philosophy throughout history; the Talmudic context has become an amalgamation of both.[17] Nonetheless, Jewish logic and rationale maintained its distinction from Greek logic,[18] but traces do appear and, as Rivka Ulmer describes it, "This influence may have been so significant that the pheno-

[14] Winston, David (1997) "Hellenistic Jewish Philosophy," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 30–48, London: Routledge.

[15] Zebiri, Kate (2003) "Towards a Rhetoric Criticism of the Qurʾan," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, 5(2): 95–120.

[16] Peters, F. E. (1996) "The Greek and Syriac Background," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 1: 40–51, London: Routledge; Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (2006) *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

[17] Novak, David (1997) "The Talmud as a Source for Philosophical Reflection," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 49–71, London: Routledge.

[18] Maccoby, Hyam (2002) *The Philosophy of the Talmud*, Abingdon: Routledge, esp. 191–202.

menon of evolving rabbinic Judaism found its distinctive expression only after it had come into contact with Hellenistic culture."[19]

The reason that the influence of Greek logic might have been a problem for understanding apparent paradoxes, whether in the Hebrew Bible, like the ritual of the red cow, or in the Qurʾan, is that when and where a particular ritual was instituted, Greek logic played no role. Hence, the apparent paradoxes surface when applying Hellenistic methods. There is a possibility that a different kind of logic existed in the Near East, in which these paradoxes would make rational sense. For example, Indian and Buddhist logic, contain a concept known as the "*catuṣkoṭi*," granting a statement four possibilities: it can be true, it can be false, it can be true and false simultaneously, or it can be neither true nor false concurrently[20]—and, in some variants of this logic in Buddhism, another possibility is none of the above.[21] The Chinese logic of uniting the opposites, as found in Taoism, is also another philosophical alternative.[22] The assumption cannot be that early Judaism or Qurʾanic philosophy during the time of Muḥammad used these specific types of oriental philosophies, but Near Eastern logic could easily have been very different from Hellenistic. Greek logic would not have been and should not be the default logic either tradition had used. Actually,

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[19] Ulmer, Rivka (1997) "The Advancement of Arguments in Exegetical Midrash Compared to that of the Greek ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*, 28(1): 48–91, 48.

[20] Gunaratne, R. D. (1980) "The Logical Form of Catuṣkoṭi: A New Solution," *Philosophy East and West*, 30(2): 211–239.

[21] Bharadwaja, V.K. (1984) "Rationality, Argumentation and Embarrassment: A Study of Four Logical Alternatives (catuṣkoṭi) in Buddhist Logic," *Philosophy East and West*, 34(3): 303–319; Gunaratne, R.D. (1986) "Understanding Nāgārjuna's Catuṣkoṭi," *Philosophy East and West*, 36(3): 213–234; Priest, Graham (2015) "None of the Above: The Catuṣkoṭi in Indian Buddhist Logic," in *New Directions in Paraconsistent Logic*, eds. Jean-Yves Beziau, Mihir Chakraborty, and Soma Dutta, 517–527, New Delhi: Springer.

[22] Cua, Antonio S. (1981) "Opposites as Complements: Reflections on the Significance of Tao," *Philosophy East and West*, 31(2): 123–140. Compare with Járos, György G. (2000) "Synergy of Complements and the Exclusivity of Opposites," *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*, 56(1): 1–19.

Ernest Horton Jr. has pointed out how Qoheleth's use of opposites and their union is distinct in its logic, being neither Greek nor Far Eastern.[23] Consequently, the apparent paradox in these texts might not have been paradoxical at all in the philosophical logic and reasoning initially intended and applied.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE RED COW

In describing the red cow, the Qurʾan etches its description from apparently various sources, both biblical and rabbinic. Some of those sources appear to be early and contemporary to the time of the Qurʾan, yet other rabbinic sources appear to be post-Qurʾanic, at least in literary form. While it would seem less likely that those rabbinic sources used the Qurʾan as a basis, then it is more likely that those post-Qurʾanic sources to have existed in seventh century, at least as oral rabbinic traditions. Yet, the context of the Qurʾan appears strikingly different from the biblical and rabbinic traditions. While the biblical and rabbinic traditions consider the context to be a purity ritual, the Qurʾan puts it in the context of resurrection.

The Qurʾanic narrative on the cow appears to have similarities to the red cow in Numbers 19 and the cow whose neck is broken (i.e., Deuteronomy 21:1–9). This, however, should not be too surprising, as *Midrash Tanḥuma* also discusses both together, along with the red cow's relationship to the golden calf, which the Qurʾan discusses before and after the cow narrative.[24]

The term *ʿeglâ* is used in Deuteronomy 21:1–9 for the atonement of an unsolved murder, a narrative possibly referenced in the Qurʾan by some interpretations. Deuteronomy's narrative is mainly a ritual for the atonement of an unsolved murder,[25] while the Qurʾan's narrative appears to be somewhat unspecific:

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[23] Horton, Ernest, Jr. (1972) "Koheleth's Concept of Opposites: As Compared to Samples of Greek Philosophy and Near and Far Eastern Wisdom Classics," *Numen*, 19(1): 1–21.

[24] *Midrash Tanḥuma*, Ḥuqqat 6–8.

[25] For a detailed study, see Willis, Timothy M. (2001) *The Elders of the City: A Study of the Elders-Laws in Deuteronomy*, Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press. Also see Blech, Benjamin (1988) "Thematic Linkage in Understanding Halakhah," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox*

> [67] And when Moses said to his people, "God commands you to slaughter a cow (*baqarah*)," they said, "Do you take us in mockery?" He said, "I seek refuge in God from being among the ignorant." [68] They said, "Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what she is." He said, "He says she is a cow (*baqarah*) neither old nor young,[26] middling between them: so do what you are commanded." [69] They said, "Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what her colour is." He said, "He says she is a yellow cow (*baqarah*). Bright is her colour, pleasing the onlookers." [70] They said, "Pray for us to your Lord, that He may clarify for us what she is. Cows (*al-baqar*) are much alike to us, and if God will we will surely be guided." [71] He said, "He says she is a cow (*baqarah*) not broken to plow the earth or to water the tillage, sound and without blemish." They said, "Now you have brought *al-ḥaqq*." So they slaughtered her, but they almost did not. [72] And when you slew a soul and cast the blame upon one another regarding it – and God is the discloser of what you were concealing – [73] We said, "Strike him with part of it." Thus does God give life to the dead and show you His signs, that haply you may understand. [Qurʾan 2:67–73][27]

Although Deuteronomy's narrative typically uses "*ʿeglâ*" for the cow upon first description, it elsewhere uses the term "*ʿeglat bāqār*," while the Qurʾan uses only "*baqarah*." Its root "*b-q-r*" has various meanings, including: to investigate or to seek,[28] which is also attested in Ezekiel 34:12:

Jewish Thought, 24(1): 59–68; Robinson, A. G. (2016) *Deuteronomy 21:1–9 a Programmatic Anamoly? A Thematic and Programmatic Analysis of Deuteronomy 21:1–9 within the Context of the Deutereonomist's Agenda*, MTh Thesis, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

[26] *TSQ* translates "*wa-lā bikr*" as without calf. However, it could also be understood as not firstborn or not young [Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) (1994) *Lisān al-ʿarab*, Beirut: Ṣādir, 7: 203–204, on "*f-r-ḍ*"; henceforth, *Lisān al-ʿarab*].

[27] All Qurʾanic translations use Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (ed.) (2015) *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, New York, NY: HarperOne; henceforth *TSQ*.

[28] Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (2000) *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 133–134; henceforth, *BDB*.

> As a shepherd seeks out (*baqqārat*) his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out (*ăbaqqēr*) my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [Ezekiel 34:12]

From the same root, the meaning to inquire or to meditate is also attested in other parts of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Leviticus 13:36, 27:33, Psalms 27:4, 2 Kings 16:15). The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (*TDOT*) suggests that this root is distinct from the root that means cattle or herd.[29] Nonetheless, the Arabic root "*b-q-r*" also has instances where it means to investigate and to seek, such as with knowledge.[30] This meaning gives the fifth Shīʿī *imām* his nickname al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (the knowledgeable).[31] The Arabic term also means to dig deep,[32] which perhaps evolved from the root to investigate. Furthermore, the meaning of cattle or herd, not necessarily specific to a cow, is also used in Hebrew, Aramaic,[33] and Arabic.[34] Although Deuteronomy 21:1–9 speaks of a cow to be sacrificed as atonement for an unsolved murder, another cow of a specific red colour is found in the purification laws in Numbers 19:1–22.

The descriptions of the cow in Numbers's purification laws and in Deuteronomy's unsolved murder are similar enough to put them in conversation but different enough to note. Numbers adds the colour of the cow as "*ʾădummâ*" (red), while the Qurʾan uses the term "*ṣafrāʾ*." Although the term "*ṣafrā*" is typically understood as yellow, it is not necessarily so. The Arabic term "*ṣafrā*" is somewhat ambiguous, as it could also mean black.[35] Nonetheless, the

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[29] Botterweck, Gerhard J. and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), J. T. Willis (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) (Revised Edition)*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2: 209; henceforth *TDOT*.
[30] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 74, on "*b-q-r.*"
[31] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 74, on "*b-q-r.*"
[32] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 74, on "*b-q-r.*"
[33] *BDB*, 133–134.
[34] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 73–74, on "*b-q-r.*"
[35] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 460, on "*ṣ-f-r.*"

colour of gold and saffron is also described as "*ṣafrāʾ*,"[36] which can be yellowish or reddish for saffron—keep in mind that the etymology of saffron is related to that of the colour, "*ṣafrāʾ*." The term "*ṣāpār*" in Aramaic is also the early morning light,[37] which would be reddish-yellow. Therefore, the colour descriptions of the cow in Numbers and the Qurʾan should not necessarily be seen as distinct from one another.[38]

In Saadia Gaon's (d. 942) Arabic translation of the Bible, he uses the Qurʾanic term "*ṣafrāʾ*" in his translation of the red cow's colour. Assuming that Saadia should have been able to distinguish between the yellow and red colours in Arabic, David Friedenreich considers his biblical translation to have been influenced by the Qurʾanic narrative.[39] Freidenreich quotes Joseph Qafiḥ's argument that Saadia understood the word "*ṣafrāʾ*" as the yellowish-brown colour of cows that occurs naturally, as a blood-like red colour is unnatural, and Saadia assumes that biblical commands can only be for naturally occurring things.[40] Freidenreich argues that Saadia's choice of the Arabic term is due to how Muslims understood this term in the Qurʾan, putting it on the spectrum between yellowness and blackness, and that the intended meaning that Saadia understood is black,[41] although I find it very unlikely, as it would go against the Mishnaic requirement that if it has as many as two black hairs, it would be rendered unfit.[42] I think it is more likely that Saadia might have understood *ṣafrāʾ* as brown, instead. If Freidenreich argues that the Arabic terms for yellow and red should be distinct, then the same can be said for yellow and black. The Qurʾan uses the root "*ḥ-m-r*" to mean red only once (i.e., Qurʾan 35:27), but the root "*ṣ-f-r*" appears several times, and is mostly not typically

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[36] *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4: 460, on "*ṣ-f-r*." Its relationship with Persian "*zarr*" meaning gold, yellow, or to shine is also possible, itself associated with saffron.
[37] *BDB*, 861.
[38] Reynolds (2018) *The Qurʾān and the Bible*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 52.
[39] Freidenreich, David M. (2003) "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's Tafsir of the Torah," *The Jewish Quarterly Reviw*, 93(3–4): 353–395.
[40] Ibid., 390–392.
[41] Ibid., 392.
[42] m. Ṭahorot, Parah.

understood as only purely yellow, but also brownish, as it describes dead plants (e.g. Qurʾan 39:21, 57:20). Therefore, the Arabic root "*ṣ-f-r*," indeed, describes a variation of colours within the yellowness and blackness spectrum, including reddish and brownish.

There was no distinct word for brown in the earliest Arabic literature, and the Arabic term later used derives from Ethiopic (*bun*), as a reference to the colour of coffee.[43] Accordingly, I feel that the argument over how different the Qurʾanic "*ṣafrāʾ*" is from the biblical reddish when it comes to the red cow is unnecessary, even though Abraham Geiger considered it a Qurʾanic error.[44] In fact, the Hebrew *ʾădummâ* shares the same root as the term for earth, which is also brownish.

The following table summarizes the cow descriptions among the texts.

Numbers	**Deuteronomy**	**Qurʾan**
red		reddish/yellow
cow (*ha-pārâ*)	cow (*ʿeglat bāqār*—female calf of the cattle)	cow (*baqarah*)
without defect / without blemish		without defect / without blemish
never yoked	never yoked / never worked	never ploughed / never irrigated
		not old
		not young
	valley with running water, neither ploughed nor sown	

Table 1: Descriptions of the Cow

[43] The reason I am suggesting possibly an Ethiopic influence in the Arabic term for brown, is that though the root (*b-n*) is Semitic and attested even in Arabic to mean seed or nut, it is usually a speicifc reference to coffee bean in Ethiopic, and from it the Ethiopic reference to brown.

[44] Heschel, Susannah (2018) "The Philological Uncanny: Nineteenth-Century Jewish Readings of the Qurʾan," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, 20(3): 193–213.

The cow of Numbers 19 is used for purification purposes,[45] in situations outlined as follows: after touching a dead "*nepeš*," for anyone inside a tent where a person dies, for every uncovered vessel, for anyone in the open field who touches a person killed by a sword or touches a dead person, a human bone, or a grave. The purification appears to be highly connected with the dead.[46] The topic of Deuteronomy 21 is atonement for an unsolved murder, which is also evidently related to death.[47]

The cow needs to be without defect or blemish, according to both the Numbers and Qurʾanic narratives. This specificity might mean that such a cow is acceptable for sacrifice (e.g., Leviticus 22:20–25),[48] a practice that appears to have been generally closely followed for sacrificial animals.[49] However, some Qumran scrolls and rabbinic discourses suggest that a controversy existed during the Second Temple period over whether the red cow was to be considered a sacrifice.[50] The implication is that if it were not considered a sacrifice, laypeople would be able to take part in the ritual.[51]

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[45] Blau, Joseph L. (1967) "The Red Heifer: A Biblical Purification Rite in Rabbinic Literature," *Numen*, 14(1): 70–78.

[46] Junker, Sandra (2011) "The Disorderly Body: Considerations of the Book of Numbers, 19 and Ritual Impurity after Contact with a Corpse," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 23(1): 197–205; Belnap, Daniel L. (2017) "Defining the Ambiguous, the Unknown, and the Dangerous: The Significance of the Ritual Process in Deuteronomy 21:1–9," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte*, 23: 209–221.

[47] MacDonald, Nathan (2012) "The Hermeneutics and Genesis of the Red Cow Ritual," *Harvard Theological Review*, 105(3): 351–371.

[48] Nolland, John (2015) "Sin, Purity and the חטאת Offering," *Vetus Testamentum*, 65(4): 606–620.

[49] Greer, Jonathan S. (2017) "'Cursed Be the Cheat Who Offers a Blemished Animal!' A Broken Tibia from a Sacrificial Deposit at Tel Dan and Its Implications for Understanding Israelite Religious Practice," in *The Wide Lans of Archaeology: Honoring Brian Hesse's Contributions to Anthropological Archaeology*, eds. Justin Lev-Tov, and Paula Hesse, and Allan Gilbert, 193–201, Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press.

[50] Birenboim, Hannan (2009) "*Tevul Yom* and the Red Heifer: Pharisaic and Sadducean Halakah," *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 16(2): 254–273.

[51] Ibid.

Only at the end of the Qurʾanic narrative does it address the issue of murder, which possibly contextualizes it with Deuteronomy 21. However, the Qurʾanic verse immediately after the cow narrative describes rocks that gush forth with water (i.e., Qurʾan 2:74), which Numbers 20 also describes immediately after the description of the red cow ritual. Some scholars believe that the Qurʾan appears to link both Numbers and Deuteronomy's narratives together and aware of both.[52] However, the Qurʾan also appears to portray some kind of discussion between Moses and his people on the cow's description, which appears in neither Numbers 19 nor Deuteronomy 21.

According to the Qurʾan's formulation of the narrative, Moses tells his people that God commanded them to kill a cow. They are not amused by such a request and think that Moses is making fun of them. He responds that this is not at all his intention. His people appear to continue to ask questions to specify the attributes of the cow. Once satisfied, they tell him, "Now you have brought *al-ḥaqq*" [Qurʾan 2:71] and slaughter the cow. The Qurʾan continues to narrate that they were about not to slaughter it (Muslim exegetes presumed that it was due to the Israelites' insistence on the cow's attributes, but the Qurʾan might have intended to mean that it was due to the rarity of performing this ritual).

I argue that the term "*al-ḥaqq*," in Qurʾan 2:71, should not necessarily be understood as "truth," which is how it is typically rendered. A cognate to the Hebrew "*ḥuqqâ*" or the plural "*ḥuqqîm*," "*al-ḥaqq*" may be understood here as a statute, as it is also with the *Qiblah* passages within the same Qurʾanic chapter.[53] Numbers 19 calls the red cow ritual a statute (*ḥuqqâ*) three times (i.e., Numbers 19:2, 19:10, 19:21), and rabbinic law also makes inferences based on its designation as a statute (*ḥuqqâ*).

For example, on the debate whether the ritual of the red cow needs to be done by the High Priest in future generations after Eleazar the priest in Numbers 19:3, the hermeneutical marker in the Babylonian Talmud is "*ḥoqâ ḥoqâ*": the use of "statute" in

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[52] Aghaei, "The Morphology of the Narrative Exegesis"; Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and the Bible*, 52–53.

[53] See my argument on the term in Galadari (2013) "The *Qibla*."

Numbers 19:2 and "statute" in Leveticus 16:34, suggesting that as the service of Yom Kippur is performed by the High Priest, so is the red cow ritual.[54] The Talmudic hermeneutics used here to derive this is the concept of "*gezerah shawah*" (equal or similar rule),[55] which uses analogical reasoning that parallels the concept of "*qiyās*" in Islamic jurisprudence.

Therefore, as it is with the *Qiblah* passages, the term "*al-ḥaqq*" in the Qurʾan pertaining to the cow in question is more likely to mean a statute instead of truth, moving in parallel with the term used for the red cow in Numbers and the Talmud, such that it would resonate with the Jewish Qurʾanic audience. The Qurʾan shows that the Israelites felt that they are being mocked by Moses. When they say that you (Moses) have now come with "*al-ḥaqq*," it is very likely that the Qurʾan is using the rabbinic interpretation of this term pertaining to the red cow, which simply means that you (Moses) have now come with a suprarational command, which human rationality does not understand, but which is followed because it is divinely ordained.

The description of the cow in the Qurʾan is not much different from that found in Numbers and Deuteronomy. However, the Qurʾan appears to show that the Israelites were trying to get very detailed descriptions of the cow, which Moses did not initially provide. The Mishnah devotes a whole tractate with the rabbis describing the ritual of the red cow, and the majority of the rules, which are extremely stringent, and not fully mentioned in Numbers.[56] As if the detailed rules described by the rabbis in the Mishnah were not enough, the Tosefta continues with rabbis explaining these Mishnaic rules.[57] Due to the rarity of this red cow, especially since having as many as two black hairs would render it unfit, the Mishnah writes that the ritual involving a red cow had

[54] b. Yoma 42b.
[55] For more information, see Chernick, Michael (1994) *Gezarah Shavah: It Various Forms in Midrashic and Talmudic Sources*. Lod: Haberman Institute for Literary Research.
[56] m. Ṭahorot, Parah.
[57] t. Ṭahorot, Parah.

been performed only nine times at most—first by Moses, next by Ezra, and either five or seven times after Ezra.[58]

Is it possible that the Qurʾan is arguing about the stringent rabbinic rulings regarding the red cow ritual that are not specifically mentioned in Numbers 19? There is some evidence in the Qurʾanic narrative that suggest the Qurʾan's possible awareness of the rabbinic rulings concerning the red cow. Neither Numbers nor Deuteronomy gives any detail concerning the age of the cow. Numbers uses the term "*pārâ*" for the cow, while Deuteronomy uses the terms "*ʿeglâ*" and "*bāqār*." The age of this heifer or cow is difficult to determine since the terms used to refer to it include almost all ages. However, the Qurʾan appears to add the description that the cow should be neither too young nor too old, but somewhere in between. Though the description of the cow's age cannot be determined in either Numbers or Deuteronomy, the first Mishnaic rule concerning the red cow features a debate among the rabbis over the suitable age of the cow: the issue being whether it should be not less than a year old, not less than two years old, or as old as five years.[59] While they quibble, R. Yehoshua suggests three years of age, but uses the unusual term "*shelashit*." When asked as to his meaning, he responds that he simply received the tradition as such without explanation,[60] as the rationale behind the red cow ritual is also transmitted through tradition without any real reasoning.[61] The usage of numbers has been argued to be a rhetorical device used in ancient Near Eastern, biblical, and rabbinic literature,[62] but its usage in the

[58] m. Ṭahorot, Parah.
[59] m. Ṭahorot, Parah.
[60] m. Parah, 1:1.
[61] Yadin-Israel, Azzan (2015) "'For Mark Was Peter's Tanna': Tradition and Transmission in Papias and the Early Rabbis," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 23(3): 337–362, 359.
[62] Pasternak, Ariel R. and Yona, Shamir (2016) "Numerical Sayings in the Literature of the Ancient Near East, in the Bible, in the Book of Ben-Sira and in Rabbinic Literature," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 19(2): 202–244.

Mishnah about the age of the red cow might have been an editing device, which is rarely used in the Hebrew Bible.[63]

Additionally, since the Mishnah describes how rabbis disqualified a cow that has as much as two hairs that are not red, Qurʾan 2:69 uses the phrase "He said, 'He says she is a yellow cow (*baqarah*). Bright is her colour, pleasing (*tasurru*) the onlookers.' " The term "*tasurru*" is understood to mean pleasing. Nonetheless, the root "*s-r-r*" or "*sh-r-r*" has various meanings. Among the meanings of this term in Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Ethiopic is "to ascertain," "to authenticate," and to establish firmly."[64] The Sumerian *sír-* also has the same meaning.[65] With such a definition found in a wide range of geographical locations surrounding Arabia in all directions, it would not be surprising if it were also understood in Arabia. The Qurʾan's use of the term should not be unexpected because it is understood by the rabbinic Jewish community—much as *ḥaqq* is possibly used for statute instead of truth in the cow passage. Thus, the colour of the cow being "*tasurru al-nāẓirīn*" is more likely to mean ascertained or authenticated by the onlookers. This would align with the rule in the Mishnah that the cow should have no more than one hair of a different colour to qualify for the ritual. To ascertain or to authenticate the colour with such a stringent ruling appears in neither Numbers nor Deuteronomy but it does appear in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Talmuds. Accordingly, the Qurʾan, just like the *Qiblah* passages,[66] is fully aware of such rulings from rabbinic literature, and not only from the Hebrew Bible.[67]

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[63] Pasternak, Ariel R. and Yona, Shamir (2017) "The Use of Numbers as an Editing Device in Rabbinic Literature," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 20(2): 193–234.

[64] *TDOT*, 15: 482–483.

[65] Parpola, Sima (2016) *Etymological Dictionary of the Sumerian Language*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 312.

[66] Galadari (2013) "The *Qibla*."

[67] The interaction of the Qurʾanic community with Jews who were possible precursors of the rabbinic tradition is very much possible. Compare with Newby (1988) *A History of the Jews*, 57–59; Firestone (2002) *Jewish Culture*; Hoyland (2011) "The Jews of the Hijaz;" Galadari (2013) "The *Qibla*;" Mazuz (2014) *The Religious and Spiritual*; Graves (2015) "The Upraised Mountain."

Many of the rules on the red cow in the Mishnah were incorporated within the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. Since the text about the rules of the red cow does not include any discussion by later rabbis (Amoraim) between the third and sixth centuries CE, it has been suggested that the rituals of the red cow were no longer performed during that period.[68] This is natural, since the rituals required priestly functions, which were suspended after the destruction of the Second Temple.[69] Nonetheless, the Babylonian Talmud refers to the red cow in many other discussions, which means that although the ritual was no longer performed, it still came up in the minds of the Amoraim rabbis, scattered throughout various Talmudic tractates.[70] It appears that rabbinic thought during the time of the Qurʾan continued to keep the ritual of the red cow in mind, requiring the Qurʾan to engage with it even though it was no longer performed. It has been suggested that the Amoraim rabbis continued to bring up the red cow in their discussions in the Talmud because it was an ambiguous puzzle.[71] Since the Talmudic rabbis are fond of logical deliberations on jurisprudence, the red cow paradox makes a wonderful intellectual exercise to discuss.

THE RED COW PARADOX

The ritual concerning the red cow seems to be one of the most bizarre to Jewish communities, as many *midrashim* attest. The source of its absurdity lies in the irrationality of purifying someone who has been defiled due to contact with a dead corpse by sprinkling them with the ashes of a red cow (itself a dead corpse) mixed with living (running) waters. The absurdity does not stop

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[68] Blau (1967) "The Red Heifer."

[69] For some debates on the rabbinic rendition of the purity laws becoming obsolete after the destruction of the Second Temple, see Poirier, John C. (2003) "Purity beyond the Temple in the Second Temple Era," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 122(2): 247–265; Balberg, Mira (2014) *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

[70] Poirier (2003) "Purity beyond the Temple;" Balberg (2014) *Purity, Body, and Self*.

[71] Poirier (2003) "Purity beyond the Temple;" Balberg (2014) *Purity, Body, and Self*.

there: the priests and everyone involved in the process of preparing the red cow ritual are themselves defiled in the ritual. In other words, to prepare the purification material, pure individuals will be defiled so that defiled individuals can become pure. The same water that purifies the defiled is what defiles the pure.

Many scholars have attempted to explain the paradox. Suggesting that the key to unlocking the mystery is the fact that it is a sin offering (*ḥaṭṭāʾt*) (i.e., Numbers 19:9).[72] Jacob Milgrom, and other recent scholars located the ritual's roots in pre-Israelite rites to purify from corpse-contamination.[73] As a purifying rite, the pre-Israelite ritual absorbs the contamination of what it attempts to purify.[74] Albert Baumgarten identifies this as the main flaw in Milgrom's analysis:[75] purification offerings are contaminated *after* they have been used in the purification process, while the red cow's ritual contaminates those involved in it even *before* it is used in the purification process.[76]

Consequently, Baumgarten argues for a different hypothesis, in that those who are involved in the preparation of the red cow become overly sanctified and need to return to normalcy.[77] One pillar of support Baumgarten marshals is that as the High Priest needs to bathe before entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he needs to do so again after completing the sacred ritual and leaving his garments aside (i.e., Leviticus 16:23–24).[78] Baumgarten explains that as the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies and performs the ritual, he becomes overly sanctified and, therefore, cannot return to normalcy and face the people in that state. Baumgarten cites Ezekiel 44:19, which states that the priests need to take off their garments after serving in the Holy of

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[72] Milgrom, Jacob (1981) "The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. XIX)," *Vetus Testamentum*, 31(1): 62–72.
[73] Ibid.; Lev, Ephraim and Lev-Yadun, Simcha (2016) "The Probable Pagan Origin of an Ancient Jewish Custom: Purification with Red Heifer's Ashes," *Advances in Anthropology*, 6(4): 122–126.
[74] Milgrom, Jacob (1981) "The Paradox."
[75] Baumgarten (1993) "The Paradox."
[76] Ibid. Emphasis is Baumgarten's.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

Holies so as not to transmit sacredness to (*yĕqaddĕšû*) the laity.[79] While the analogy to the Day of Atonement ritual may work, it is a major flaw to assume the same occurs in the ritual of the red cow for a very simple reason: the text of Numbers 19 is very explicit that those involved in the ritual become impure (*ṭamēʾ*). Neither Leviticus nor Ezekiel use this description for a priest after entering the Holy of Holies. Ezekiel is explicit that they are sanctified, using the root "*q-d-š*," and not impure. Accordingly, Numbers 19 would not use the term that everyone involved in the red cow's ritual would become impure (*ṭamēʾ*) simply to mean that one has become overly sanctified. Therefore, while Baumgarten is justified to find Milgrom's explanation flawed, his own explanation is equally problematic.

Other interpretations have been floated: William Gilder suggests that perhaps the red cow's ritual conveys a symbolic meaning instead of the effectiveness of its actual act, but that this symbolic meaning itself is absent from the text.[80] Dominic Rudman argues that the ritual has a weak polluting agent purifying a greater impurity,[81] but that still does not solve the paradox.

Numbers (*Bamidbar*) *Rabbah*, a *midrash* dated sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century CE—but from a portion essentially identical to *Midrash Tanḥuma*, dated around the eighth century—states the following concerning the rabbinic commentary on Numbers 19 about the red cow concerning how the pure come out of the impure and calling it a statute (*ḥuqqat*) attempting to make sense of the ritual:

> This is the statute (*ḥuqqat*) – As it is said verse (Job 14:4): Who gave (brought forth) purity to one who is impure?, such as Abraham from Terah, Hezekiah from Aḥaz, etc., Israel from the nations of the world, the world to come from this world. … There we learned (Parah 4:4): those who occupy themselves

[79] Ibid., 448.

[80] Gilders, William K. (2006) "Why Does Eleazar Sprinkle the Red Cow Blood? Making Sense of a Biblical Ritual," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 6(9): 1–16.

[81] Rudman, Dominic (2003) "Water for Impurity or Water of Impurity? The Red Cow of Numbers 19 Revisited," *Old Testament Essays*, 16(1): 73–78.

> with the Parah from beginning to end, impurify their clothes, but it makes clothes Pure. God said: I carved a law (into the fabric of creation), a decree I made, you have no ability to transgress (override) My law!
>
> This is the statute (*ḥuqqat*) of the Torah – (Psalms 12:6). The sayings of God are pure (i.e., they purify). … as it is said: And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance (*ḥuqqat*) of the Torah:
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> … The Holy One blessed be he said to Moses: "to you I will reveal the reason for the red cow, but for others it will be a decree (*ḥuqqat*) (without reason)," …
>
> A gentile asked Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, "These rituals you do, they seem like witchcraft! You bring a heifer, burn it, crush it up, and take its ashes. [If] one of you is impure by the dead [the highest type of impurity], two or three drops are sprinkled on him, and you declare him pure?!" He said to him, "Has a restless spirit ever entered you?" He said to him, "No!" "Have you ever seen a man where a restless spirit entered him?" He said to him, "Yes!" [Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai] said to him, "And what did you do for him?" He said to him, "We brought roots and made them smoke beneath him, and pour water and it flees." He said to him, "Your ears should hear what leaves from your mouth! The same thing is true for this spirit, the spirit of impurity, as it is written, (Zachariah 13:2) 'Even the prophets and the spirit of impurity will I remove from the land.' They sprinkle upon him purifying waters, and it [the spirit of impurity] flees." After he left, our rabbi's students said, "You pushed him off with a reed. What will you say to us?" He said to them, "By your lives, a dead person doesn't make things impure, and the water doesn't make things pure. Rather, God said, 'I have instated a statute, I have decreed a decree (*ḥuqqat ḥaqaqti gezera gazarti*), and you have no permission to transgress what I decreed,' as it says 'This is a statute (*ḥuqqat*) of the Torah.'"[82]

The Qurʾanic narrative of the cow speaks of hitting the parts of the cow against itself and it is thus that God resurrects the dead. Although the narrative of the red cow in Numbers or the cow

[82] *Numbers Rabbah*, 19.

whose neck is broken in Deuteronomy is an issue of impurity due to death or atoning for an unsolved murder, it does not specifically raise the topic of resurrection. In the aforementioned *midrash*, however, a question from Job 14:4 arises: "who gave purity to the impure?" Then, the *midrash* gives examples of Abraham (pure) coming out of Terah (impure), Hezekiah (pure) from Ahaz (impure), Israel (pure) from the nations of the world (impure), and the world to come (pure) from this world (impure). The *midrash* is more specific about how the pure emerges from the impure. This is further exemplified in *Numbers Rabbah* 19:4, which in turn is also elaborated upon by the rabbis in *Qoheleth Rabbah* 8:1.5:

> R. Mana of Shaab in Galilee said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: In connection with every law which the Holy One, blessed be He, communicated to Moses, He expounded to him its uncleanness and purification; but when he reached the chapter, Speak unto the priests (Leviticus 21), he [Moses] spoke before Him, "Lord of the universe, if these [the priests] are defiled wherewith do they regain their state of purity?" He gave no answer, and at that time the face of Moses changed. When, however, He reached the chapter of the Red Heifer, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, "Moses, when I made to you the statement 'Speak unto the priests,' and you asked Me, 'If they are defiled wherewith do they regain their purity?' I gave you no answer. This is their method of purification, 'And for the unclean they shall take of the ashes of the burning of the purification from sin (Numbers 19:7).' " He [Moses] spoke before Him, "Lord of the universe, is this purification [i.e., Moses asked of the Lord the very question that kept puzzling the rabbis through the generations, how can ashes, themselves defiling, remove the defilement caused by contact with the dead]?" And the Holy One, blessed be He, replied, "Moses, it is a statute (*ḥoq*), and I have made a decree, and nobody can fathom my decree."[83]

Noticeably, it is as though God brings the pure out of the impure. The Qurʾanic narrative, which is not explicit about how the pure comes out of the impure, perhaps instead uses the metaphor of

[83] Blau (1967) "The Red Heifer," 77–78.

the living coming out of the dead, where the pure is symbolic of the living and the impure symbolic of the dead (as itself is the cause of impurity in Numbers 19). This symbolism is explicit in Qurʾan 91:7–10, where a pure soul (*zakiyyah*) is contrasted with a buried soul: "[7] by the soul and the One Who fashioned it [8] and inspired it as to what makes it iniquitous or reverent! [9] Indeed, he prospers who purifies it (*zakkāhā*). [10] And indeed he fails who buries it (*dassāhā*)"[84] [Qurʾan 91:7–10]. Therefore, the pure vis-à-vis impure imagery of the red cow ritual *midrash* parallels how the Qurʾan sometimes contrasts purity with death instead.

Given the context, the Qurʾanic narrative concerning the cow perhaps is not literally about the physical resurrection of the dead, but a metaphor for how those who are spiritually alive come out of those who are spiritually dead. Note also that the aforementioned *midrash* relates the rabbinic understanding of the term *ḥoq*—as a suprarational decree that is not understood by human reason—with the Qurʾanic use of *al-ḥaqq* in the cow narrative, as discussed earlier. The Qurʾan seems to be aware of its rabbinic interpretation and for that reason shows that the Israelites ultimately tell Moses after his description of the cow that he has brought them *al-ḥaqq*, because his explanation of God's commandment makes no rational sense.

The Qurʾanic narrative of the cow is further connected with the red cow of Numbers 19, because immediately after the narrative, the Qurʾan discusses the rock that brings forth water, which is itself mentioned in Numbers 20.

> Then your hearts hardened thereafter, being like stones or harder still. For indeed among stones are those from which streams gush forth, and indeed among them are those that split and water issues from them, and indeed among them are those that crash down from the fear of God. And God is not heedless of what you do. [Qurʾan 2:74]

This Qurʾanic passage that comes immediately after the cow's narrative seems to engage with the waters of Meribah, immediately after the red cow's narrative in Numbers:

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[84] *TSQ* translates "*dassāhā*" as "obscures it."

> [7] and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [8] "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." [9] And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him. [10] Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" [11] And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. [Numbers 20:7–11]

Numbers Rabbah provides the following commentary on this narrative, which is echoed in the Qurʾan's accusation of the Israelite stubbornness when discussing the rock that gushes with water:

> They began to say "Moses knows the statute (*ḥoq*) of the rock. If he asks, it will bring forth water." So Moses was uncertain – "If I listen to them I nullify the words of the Allpresent, and the Holy One (Job 5:13) 'takes the wise in their craftiness.' " But Moses had been careful for 40 years not to get angry at them, because he was terrified of the oath the Holy One swore: "Not one of these men will see [the land]…" They said to him: "Here is a rock; just as you want to bring forth water from another rock, bring it forth from this one." He shouted at them "Hear now, you rebels (*ha-morîm*)!" "Rebels (*ha-morîm shyṭîn*)" has many meanings: (1) "stubborn ones" (*ha-morîm sarbānîm*) (2) "fools" – in the sea villages they call fools "*morîm*." (3) "those who teach their teachers." (4) "archers" (In 1 Sam 30:3 the word "*morîm*" is used to mean "archers.") … Even so, Moses only used the rock that the Holy One told him [to use].[85]

This *midrash* essentially provides several meanings for the term "*mōrîm*," one of which is "*sarbānîm*," meaning disobediently stubborn. When the Qurʾanic passage explains that their hearts were like stone or harder still, it appears also to understand "*mōrîm*" in the Numbers narrative as stubborn. This might suggest that the Qurʾan is aware of some *midrashic* traditions that were later compiled in *Numbers Rabbah*.

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[85] *Numbers Rabbah* 19.9.

Ali Aghaei argues that the Qurʾanic narrative might be engaging with the Haftarah reading on the Parashat of the Sabbath of Parah,[86] which includes a reading from Ezekiel 36:16–36(38).[87] That passage in Ezekiel discusses how God would purify the Israelites, who had been scattered. God would replace their hearts of stone with a heart of flesh (i.e., Ezekiel 36:26), which perhaps is the accusation in Qurʾan 2:74: that their hearts are as hard as stone or even harder. Ezekiel 36:33–38 shows how God will bring back to life the desolate cities, which has echoes in Qurʾan 2:259; however, what is more significant on the issue of resurrection is that these passages in Ezekiel immediately precede the resurrection imagery of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Since this image of resurrection is understood metaphorically, then the same may be said about the Qurʾan, in which its narrative of the cow is related to bringing the dead back to life. The purification of Israel in Ezekiel 36–37 depicts their resurrection by reviving desolate cities and bringing the exile back. Perhaps the Qurʾan is not even specifically talking about God's ability to return the exiled Israelites historically, but is also addressing the Jewish Diaspora and, thus, in conversation with Jewish liturgy.

Qoheleth Rabbah, a *haggadic* commentary to the book of Qoheleth, dated between the sixth and eighth centuries CE,[88] fits well into the period of the Qurʾanic composition. According to *Qoheleth Rabbah,* King Solomon had the wisdom to understand the various statutes of the Torah, but even after seeking more wisdom, he could not comprehend the red cow ritual.[89] The author of *Qoheleth Rabbah* appears to be saying that though Solomon was a wiser man than Moses, even he was unable to understand the logic of the red cow ritual. *Midrash Tanḥuma* shares this

[86] Aghaei, Ali (2020) "Qur'anic Intertextuality with Jewish-Rabbinic Tradition: the Case of 'the Cow' in Q 2:67-74." *The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies*, 19 May.

[87] Some traditions read Ezekiel 36:16–36, while others read Ezekiel 36:16–38.

[88] Kiperwasser, Reuven (2010) "Toward a Redaction History of Kohelet Rabbah: A Study in the Composition and Redaction of Kohelet Rabbah 7:7." *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 61(2): 257–277.

[89] *Qoheleth Rabbah*, 7:23.4.

assessment: "Solomon said, 'All this I have stood, and I have questioned a red cow, and I have asked and searched, and I have said wisdom, and it is far from me'."[90] The paradox of the red cow ritual seems to have been completely incomprehensible, as seen by the Jewish attitudes at least at the time of the *midrash*. Alfred Edersheim stated, "Without some deeper symbolical meaning attaching to them, the peculiarities of the sin-offering of the red heifer would indeed be well-nigh unintelligible."[91]

It is perhaps such an attitude that the Qurʾan is engaging with when stating that the Jews felt they were being mocked by Moses,

> And when Moses said to his people, "God commands you to slaughter a cow (*baqarah*)," they said, "Do you take us in mockery?" He said, "I seek refuge in God from being among the ignorant." [Qurʾan 2:67]

The Qurʾan appears to affirm that this "*ḥaqq*" is not meant as a mockery just because it appears to make no sense. The Qurʾan justifies this statute and gives a reason behind it, "Thus does God give life to the dead and show you His signs, that haply you may understand" [Qurʾan 2:73]. The purpose of this puzzle, according to the Qurʾan, is that God wants to show how the living indeed come out of the dead, or perhaps in the Jewish understanding, the pure come out of the impure.

The notion of God bringing the living out of the dead is reiterated in several passages in the Qurʾan. Some of these appear to have inner-Qurʾanic allusions to one another. For example,

> [3] And among humankind are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge, and follow every rebellious satan (*shayṭānin marīd*), [4] for whom it is decreed that, should anyone take him as a protector, he will cause him to go astray and guide him unto the punishment of the Blaze. [5] O humankind! If you are in doubt (*rayb*) concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and

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[90] *Midrash Tanḥuma*, Ḥuqqat, 6.
[91] Edersheim, Alfred (1959) *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*, London: James Clarke & Co, 351–352.

> unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind. [6] That is because God is "*al-ḥaqq*,"[92] and because He gives life to the dead, and because He is Powerful over all things, [7] and because the Hour is coming, in which there is no doubt (*lā rayb*), and because God will resurrect whosoever is in the graves. [8] And among humankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book. [Qurʾan 22:3–8]

There are five points of intertextuality between these passages and those about the red cow.[93] The first point of intertextuality concerns those who dispute God without knowledge, recalling the Israelites in the waters of Meribah, according to Numbers 20. The second point of intertextuality is the Qurʾanic passage calling anyone who disputes God without knowledge a rebellious satan (*shayṭānin marīd*) or, in *Numbers Rabbah* "*ha-morîm shyṭîn*." The third point of intertextuality is the Qurʾanic use—twice in the preceding passage—of the term "*rayb*," which is also used in Numbers 20:3 in the narrative of the waters gushing out of the rock in Meribah, and is, in fact, the reason the place is called Meribah, according to Numbers 20:13. The fourth point of intertextuality is the use of the term "*ḥaqq*" in Qurʾan 22:6, which the red cow of Numbers 19 and its Jewish commentary also frequently use, and which is also used in the narrative of the cow in Qurʾan 2:71. The fifth point of intertextuality is the passage's concern with resurrecting the dead, just as the narrative of the cow in the Qurʾan.

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[92] Moving along the previous definition of "*al-ḥaqq*," I keep the original term here instead of translating it to "truth," as used by the *TSQ*.

[93] I have argued elsewhere the importance of "intertextual polysemy" in Qurʾanic hermeneutics; see Galadari, Abdulla (2013) "The Role of Intertextual Polysemy in Qur'anic Exegesis," *International Journal on Quranic Research*, 3(4): 35–56; Galadari, Abdulla (2018) *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

With these five intertextualities, it seems that the passage above is an inner-Qurʾanic allusion to the cow narrative in the Qurʾan. Accordingly, the resurrection of the dead in these passages might also be metaphorical, meaning to bring forth the pure from the impure.

Another passage in the Qurʾan that also discusses the resurrection of the dead also appears to have an inner-Qurʾanic allusion with the cow narrative and the waters of Meribah:

> [14] They will call unto them, "Were we not with you?" They reply, "Indeed! But you tempted yourselves, bided your time, and doubted (*irtabtum*); and false hopes deluded you till the Command of God came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God. [15] So this day no ransom shall be taken from you, or from those who disbelieved." Your refuge shall be the Fire; it shall be your master. What an evil journey's end! [16] Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to be humbled to the remembrance of God and "*al-ḥaqq*"[94] that has come down, and to be not like those who were given the Book aforetime? But the span of time was too long for them, such that their hearts hardened and many of them are iniquitous. [17] Know that God revives the earth after its death. We have indeed made the signs clear for you, that haply you may understand. [Qurʾan 57:14–17]

The consequence of such inner-Qurʾanic allusion is that if the resurrection in the cow narrative is understood metaphorically, then this passage, which is typically understood eschatologically, might also be metaphorical. The first point of intertextuality is the use of the term "*irtabtum*," from the root "*rayb*," as used in Qurʾan 22:5 and 22:7 and used in Numbers 20, as discussed earlier. The second point of intertextuality is the above passage's discussion of a ransom, which can be understood as a sacrifice. The sacrifice of the red cow seems a likely interpretation, especially when placed within the context of the remaining intertextualities. The third point of intertextuality is the use of the term "*ḥaqq*," as used in the Qurʾanic narrative of the cow and the red cow of

[94] Moving along the previous definition of "*al-ḥaqq*," I keep the original term here instead of translating it to "truth," as used by the *TSQ*.

Numbers 19 and its commentary. The fourth point of intertextuality is the hardening of hearts like those of the People of the Book, which appears to be an inner-Qurʾanic allusion to Qurʾan 2:74's narration of the waters of Meribah. The resurrection of the dead, as also seen in the Qurʾanic narrative of the cow (i.e., Qurʾan 2:73) is the fifth point of intertextuality, and the sixth point of intertextuality is the statement, "*qad bayyannā lakum al-āyāt laʿallakum taʿqilūn* (We have indeed made the signs clear for you, that haply you may understand)" [Qurʾan 57:17], which parallels "*wa-yurīkum āyātihi laʿallakum taʿqilūn* (and He shows you His signs, that haply you may understand)" [Qurʾan 2:73]. Given these six points of intertextuality, it seems likely that the resurrection of the dead in Qurʾan 57:14–17 is metaphorical.

THE RED COW AS AN ALLUSION TO THE GOLDEN CALF

Some rabbinic traditions link the red cow ritual with the golden calf narrative.[95] The Qurʾanic narrative of the reddish/yellowish cow is preceded by that narrative as well (i.e., Qurʾan 2:51–54).

According to the Talmud, the rabbis suggest that the Israelites were supposed to have everlasting life, because they accepted the Torah, and the angel of death would have no authority over them.[96] However, the Israelites were re-subjected to mortality because of the sin of the golden calf.[97]

According to Rashi, the reason the red cow ritual was entrusted to Eleazar instead of his father, Aaron, is due to the latter's role in the golden calf; Aaron essentially became unworthy of performing the role.[98] Rashi interprets the three types of yarn—cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet—in the ritual to symbolize the three thousand men who fell by the edge of the sword due to the golden calf.[99] He also explains symbolically, the cedar is lofty while the hyssop is lowly, so that a person who prides themselves on a high position is a sinner, and so to receive atonement, they need to

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[95] Newman, Stephen (2015) "Understanding the Mystery of the Red Heifer Ritual," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 43(2): 1061–08.
[96] b. ʿAbodah Zarah, 5a.
[97] b. ʿAbodah Zarah, 5a.
[98] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.
[99] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.

make themselves as lowly as the hyssop and the worm (in Hebrew, a play on words with scarlet yarn).[100] Rashi also states that, as the golden calf made everyone who took part in it impure, so are those who take part in the ritual of the red cow made impure.[101] Because the Israelites became morally blemished and defective on account of the golden calf, the unblemished and without defect red cow would be the cause for their atonement—to regain their perfection.[102] Additionally, the red cow symbolizes the mother of the golden calf, which takes away the sin caused by its child.[103] While Rashi is a medieval commentator, he drew from various prior sources.[104] After all, the relationship between the red cow and the golden calf appears in *Midrash Tanḥuma*, which states, "Let a heifer come and atone for the incident of the [golden] calf."[105] While *Midrash Tanḥuma* and Rashi are post-Qurʾanic, the relationship between the red cow and the golden calf have traces to earlier traditions of the Amoraic period (around third through fifth century CE).[106]

David Wright argues that Numbers 31:19–24 is connected to the red cow ritual in Numbers 19.[107] However, one noteworthy difference in Numbers 31:23 is that anything that can go through fire, such as gold, needs to be placed first into the fire and then into the water to be purified. If Numbers 31:19–24 is connected with the red cow of Numbers 19, as David Wright argues,[108] then it might connect to the golden calf, which also went through fire,

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[100] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.
[101] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.
[102] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.
[103] Rashi on Numbers 19:22.
[104] Newman, "Understanding the Mystery"; Schoenfeld, Devorah (2013) *Isaac on Jewish and Christian Altars: Polemic and Exegesis in Rashi and the Glossa Ordinaria*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 31–60.
[105] *Midrash Tanḥuma*, Ḥuqqat 8
[106] From homiletic material found in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana.* See Pregill, Michael (2020) *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 131–132, 258.
[107] Wright, David W. (1985) "Purification from Corpse-Contamination in Numbers XXXI 19–24," *Vetus Testamentum*, 35(2): 213–223.
[108] Ibid.

before being mixed with water and given to the Israelites to drink, as some sort of atonement or, arguably, purification. The golden calf was melted in fire, smashed into fine dust, mixed with streaming water (something that is also necessary with the red cow), and then the Israelites were made to drink it (i.e., Exodus 32:20). All of these features link the golden calf with the red cow ritual in rabbinic literature.

On the scenario of drinking in the golden calf, Philippe Guillaume writes, "What the Israelites drunk and why is entirely unexplained."[109] Though not itself a paradox, it still is a puzzle in its own right. While the Levites only killed three thousand of the guilty Israelites, Moses apparently had everyone drink the calf, and Exodus 32:3 explicitly states that all the people were, in fact, guilty of bringing gold to Aaron for the golden calf. Guillaume suggests that perhaps drinking the calf allowed the Levites to determine who was guilty of the sin and who was not, as it is apparent that not everyone was necessarily guilty, especially if the Levites killed only three thousand and spared the rest.[110] Otherwise, Guillaume remarks that if the Levites were the only ones not guilty, they would have killed all other non-Levites, but that did not happen.[111] Other scholars, such as Christopher Begg, also argued alongside Guillaume that drinking the calf separated the guilty from the non-guilty.[112] While Begg and Guillaume make solid observations about the golden calf narrative, Mark O'Brien is correct that there still is no evidence that the real purpose for everyone to drink the calf was to expose the guilty.[113] O'Brien emphasizes that everyone was guilty, especially in light of Exodus

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[109] Guillaume, Philippe (2013) "Drinking Golden Bull: The Erased Ordeal in Exodus 32," in *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*, eds. Helen R. Jacobus, Anne K. de Hemmer Gudme, and Philippe Guillaume, 135–147, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 135.
[110] Ibid., 135–147.
[111] Ibid., 140.
[112] Begg, Christopher (1985) "The Destruction of the Calf (Exod 32,20/ Deut 9,21)," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft: Deuteronomy: Origin, Form and Message*, ed. Norbert Lohfink, 208–251, Leuven: Leuven University Press.
[113] O'Brien, Mark A. (2012) "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32–34)," *Australian Biblical Review*, 60: 18–31.

32:3.[114] Essentially, even after the Levites kill the three thousand people, Moses addresses the people the next day that they were sinful and says that he will ask God to atone for their sin (i.e., Exodus 32:30). This suggests that there were still sinful people in his audience. As Moses asks God to forgive the sin of the people, the narrative itself remains inconclusive on whether God has forgiven them or not, because God states that He will blot from His book anyone who has sinned against Him (i.e., Exodus 32:33–34). The narrative even continues with God then smiting the Israelites because they made the calf (i.e., Exodus 33:35).

All this suggests that even after the Levites killed the three thousand, the sinners were still among those who remained. Perhaps everyone was indeed guilty, which would make unlikely Begg and Guillaume's suggestion that drinking the calf was to expose the sinners for the Levites to kill. The Levitical killing also appears in the Qurʾanic narrative of the golden calf with the specific command by Moses to the Israelites, "kill yourselves (*f-aqtulū anfusakum*)" [Qurʾan 2:54].

After discussing the golden calf and the red cow narratives, the Qurʾan returns to the the golden calf again. Qurʾan 2:92–93 states that the golden calf was drunk by the Israelites due to their sinfulness, but it is ambiguous in the sense that it states that they drank the calf into their hearts instead of into their bellies. Accordingly, it is unknown whether the Qurʾan understands the Exodus narrative as something literal or symbolic. While Exodus is not explicit on the reason why the Israelites were given the golden calf to drink, it appears that the Qurʾan understands the reason is due to their sin; something understood implicitly in Exodus.

Immediately after the first Qurʾanic narrative on the golden calf and the Levitical killing, the Israelites tell Moses that they will only believe in him if they see God plainly (i.e., Qurʾan 2:55). As a response, a great cry (*ṣāʿiqah*) seizes them. Qurʾan 2:56 implies that the cry had killed them and God had resurrected them after it. This very specific narrative in the Qurʾan is ambiguous in terms of what it corresponds to in the biblical or rabbinic tradition. Actually, Exodus 33:18–23 shows Moses asking to see God's

[114] Ibid.

glory while interceding for the Israelites after the golden calf incident. The Qurʾan brings up this narrative in Qurʾan 7:143, where Moses is taken by a loud cry (*ṣaʿiqā*) and is then awakened from it. Traditional exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī have read this Moses narrative as implying his death and resurrection.[115] Yet, it appears al-Ṭabarī may somehow have had some knowledge of Jewish tradition, in which he explicitly mentions the Torah, as he states that God informs Moses that nobody sees him and survives,[116] an allusion to Exodus 33:20.

Yet the Qurʾanic narrative of Moses asking to see God in Qurʾan 7:143 differs somewhat from Exodus 33:18–23. In the Qurʾanic narrative, God asks Moses to watch a mountain; when God descends and the mountain remains in its place, Moses will be able to see God. However, when God descends, the mountain is crushed, implying that Moses will not be able to see God—and in fact, Moses is overcome by a great cry and then repents. This implies that Moses had sinned, unless one understands *tubtu ilayk* ("I repent to you") simply by its etymology connoting that Moses is returning to God (perhaps in will, in mind, etc.) instead of necessarily a repentance from sin.

To understand the mystery of the red cow, one must first understand the connotations attached to the golden calf.[117] To explain why a golden calf was chosen by the Israelites as an object of worship, Stephen Newman[118] looks to an ancient Egyptian link, in the worship of the goddess Hathor[119] (something other scholars also consider).[120] Although this hypothesis is not necessarily fully convincing, it still is interesting to note. Since Hathor was associated in ancient Egypt with life and reproduction, Newman

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[115] Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) (2000) *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. Beirut: al-Risālah, (Q. 7:143), 13: 92–98.
[116] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, (Q. 7:143), 13: 90–96.
[117] Newman (2015) "Understanding the Mystery."
[118] Newman, "Understanding the Mystery." Compare with Chung, Youn H. (2010) *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible's Negative Attitude toward the Golden Calf*, London: T&T Clark.
[119] Newman (2015) "Understanding the Mystery." Compare with Chung, *Sin of the Calf*.
[120] Danelius, Eva (1967) "The Sins of Jeroboam ben-Nabat," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 58: 95–114.

suggests it to be a possible reason why a red cow would have the power to purify those who were in contact with the dead:[121]

> Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan explains that the rite of burning the Red Heifer was a reenactment of the destruction of the Golden Calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. Thus, it would also be a symbolic destruction of the cow-goddess Hathor which the Golden Calf represented. This explains why a red cow was needed for the ritual. The association with cleansing from impurity as a result of contact with a dead body is understood, in light of the midrash in TB Avodah Zarah 22b, to mean that the Israelites attained a state of immortality at Mount Sinai, but lost it due to the sin of the Golden Calf. Purification from death thus involves rejection of the Golden Calf, demonstrated by the ashes of the Red Heifer. This is especially powerful considering that Hathor was associated in Egypt with life and reproduction. Seen in this light, the Red Heifer ritual is a total rejection of Egyptian idolatry and its symbols. The ritual includes burning a crimson thread (Num. 19:6), which may likewise be a negation of the magic scarlet ribbon worn by the cow-goddess that was thought capable of binding evil spirits.[122]

So while the red cow represents Egyptian idolatry, according to biblical (e.g., Genesis 35:2) and Mishnaic accounts,[123] those who are in contact with idols become impure.[124] Accordingly, Newman states, "The impurity contracted by dealing with the Red Heifer is therefore associated with the idolatry that it represented."[125] Yet Hathor also had a role in assisting the dead into their journey to the afterlife:[126] she also passes between the realms of the living

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[121] Newman (2015) "Understanding the Mystery."

[122] Newman (2015) "Understanding the Mystery," 107. On the scarlet ribbon worn by Hathor, see Harris, Eleanor L. (1998) *Ancient Egyptian Divination and Magic*, Boston, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 59.

[123] m. Shabbat 9:1.

[124] Newman (2015) "Understanding the Mystery," 107.

[125] ibid.

[126] Lichtheim, Miriam (1976) *Ancient Egyptian Literature 2: The New Kingdom*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 197–199; Brewer, Douglas J. and Teeter, Emily (2007) *Egypt and the Egyptians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 170; McGill, B.G. (2008) "Hathor in the

and the dead,[127] perhaps also associating the red cow with death and resurrection.

Although the golden calf narrative is in Exodus and the ritual of the red cow is in Numbers, the Qurʾan does contextualize both into a single narrative on the history of the Israelites saved from Egypt (i.e., Qurʾan 2:49–74). While an intertextual analysis is not fully conclusive, it might be possible that the Qurʾan is perhaps aware of some Jewish traditions that link the red cow ritual with the golden calf. Since the Qurʾan describes the colour of the red cow with "*ṣafrāʾ*," which as described can be reddish or yellowish, it might itself be an allusion to the colour presumed by the Qurʾan for the golden calf. Though I find the most convincing alternative is that the Qurʾanic colour and that of Numbers 19 simply denote a brownish cow, it does not preclude the Qurʾan's use of polysemy and wordplay.

Consider the following: (1) some Jewish traditions make a connection between the golden calf and the red cow; (2) some rabbinic traditions understand that the Israelites were given immortality due to their experience at Sinai, but were resubjected to death due to the golden calf; and (3) the red cow is undoing the sin of the golden calf. From these premises, one might deduce that the red cow purifies the Israelites from the realm of the dead so that they may partake in the realm of the living. Perhaps this deduction means the Qurʾan is associating the red cow narrative with death and resurrection, similar to Parashat Parah's reading of Ezekiel 36:16–38, which itself is contextualized with death and resurrection found in Ezekiel 37.

CONCLUSION

The cow narrative in Qurʾan 2:67–73 has elements that include the red cow's account in Numbers 19 and Deuteronomy 21:1–9, as well as in rabbinic literature, especially about the cow's age and the description of her needing to be satisfactorily of uniform

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Context of the Coffin Texts," *Studia Antiqua*, 6(1): 27–32; Basson, Danielle (2012) *The Goddess Hathor and the Women of Encient Egypt*, Masters Thesis, Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 27, 81–85.

[127] Graves-Brown, Carolyn (2010) *Dancing for Hathor: Women in Ancient Egypt*, London: Continuum Books, 166–167.

colour. It is, therefore, without doubt that the Qurʾan is aware of Jewish tradition and literature about the red cow. The main difference is that the Qurʾan places it in the context of resurrection, while the biblical and rabbinic literature do not always do so—at least not directly.

According to both the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic tradition, "death" is the chief source of "*ṭumʾah*" (impurity).[128] Jacob Milgrom states:

> The bodily impurities enumerated in the Torah focus on four phenomena: death, blood, semen, and scale-disease. Their common denominator is death. Vaginal blood and semen represent the forces of life; their loss—death. In the case of scale-disease, this symbolism is made explicit: Aaron prays for his stricken sister, "Let her not be like a corpse" (Num. 12:12). Furthermore, scale-disease is powerful enough to contaminate by overhang, and it is no accident that it shares this feature with the corpse (Num. 19:14). The wasting of the body, the common characteristic of all biblically impure skin diseases, symbolizes the death process as much as the loss of blood and semen.[129]

Milgrom continues,

> Of all the diachronic changes that occur in the development of Israel's impurity laws, this clearly is the most significant: the total severance of impurity from the demonic and its reinterpretation as a symbolic system reminding Israel of its imperative to cleave to life and reject death.[130]

The Qurʾan might understand resurrection in the cow narrative as purification from "*ṭumʾah*" or death. Yet this death does not necessarily have to be physical death. It might hold its similarity with Adam, who perhaps lost his opportunity for immortality, and became spiritually dead. As the rabbis in the Talmud state, the Israelites became immortal for accepting the Torah but lost this

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[128] Feldman, Emanuel (1972) "Death as Estrangement: The Halakhah of Mourning," *Judaism*, 21(1): 59–66.
[129] Milgrom, Jacob (1993) "The Rationale for Biblical Impurity," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, 22: 107–111, 109–110.
[130] Ibid., 110.

immortality due to the sin of the golden calf. Thus, perhaps the Qurʾan even understands this as spiritual death, in which the red cow is undoing the sin of the golden calf that caused such spiritual death.

Many scholars have had different approaches in understanding biblical and rabbinic impurity laws, some emphasizing death and others sin (itself associated with spiritual death). Still others approach it from a hygienic perspective emphasizing the sacredness of the Temple. Vered Noam states:

> From Philo of Alexandria to contemporary scholars, a multitude of approaches to understanding the formative concept of purity and impurity in biblical writings have been proposed, with the numerous explanations reflecting the prevailing circumstances, the accepted norms, and the sentiments of their authors no less than they do the world of the Bible. These approaches can be classified according to their underlying perception of impurity, … Some of them derive from the naturalistic perception of impurity as an entity, explaining it variously as a reflection of demonic worlds, an expression of death with all that it entails, or a "side effect" of transition states and human crises. A second approach, meanwhile, proposes a symbolic interpretation that views ritual impurity as a reflection of moral values of sin and expiation. And yet a third approach, at the opposite end of the spectrum, represents an absolute reduction of biblical impurity, interpreting it instrumentally as a system that lacks actual existence or inner content but that serves certain social needs, whether religious or secular, such as hygiene, esthetics, reinforcing the sacredness of the Temple or the distinctiveness of the Jewish people, strengthening the status of the priesthood, or disputing pagan concepts of holiness.[131]

In short, while the Qurʾan contextualizes the narrative of the cow to bringing life back to the dead, its portrayal of the resurrection power of this ritual is metaphorical to bringing purity from impurity. The Qurʾan is, thus, not having a different context, but simply uses different terms as a metaphor for the same biblical

[131] Noam, Vered (2010) "Ritual Impurity in Tannaitic Literature: Two Opposing Perspectives," *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, 1: 65–103, 67–69.

and rabbinic context of the red cow ritual. Comparatively, it is elsewhere argued that even though the Qurʾanic context of the metaphor of the camel passing through the eye of the needle appears to be different from its use in the Synoptic Gospels, the Qurʾan perhaps merely redefines and interprets the metaphor within the same context.[132] Hence, the Qurʾan might be doing the same thing with the red cow narrative. Additionally, it may also be appropriate to further investigate the dating of some *midrash* by taking into consideration the Qurʾan's possible allusions to them. The later *midrash* might have used a shared source with the Qurʾan or, perhaps, some parts of their editing layers may be dated earlier than thought. It would be less likely that the Qurʾan in specifically the topic of the red cow ritual influenced these Jewish traditions subtly, especially since the ritual was no longer performed at the time.

[132] Galadari, Abdulla (2019) "The Camel Passing through the Eye of the Needle: A Qur'anic Interpretation of the Gospels," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 55: 77–89.